

UK Rejects More Ukrainian Asylum Claims Amid Policy Shift

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The UK government has significantly increased the number of permanent asylum refusals for Ukrainian nationals, citing improved safety in Ukraine's western regions. The move, which tightens eligibility for long-term resettlement, has sparked concern among legal experts and displaced Ukrainians, especially those affected by the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine.

As the number of asylum applications continues to place pressure on Britain's immigration system, the Home Office has begun to apply stricter criteria. Officials argue that the threat to life and safety in parts of Ukraine has reduced, particularly in regions not directly affected by Russian military activity.

A Home Office country policy report, published at the end of January 2025, is now being used as a key reference in assessing applications. It concludes that many western regions, specifically Kyiv, Chernivtsi, Zakarpattia, Ternopil, Rivne, Ivano-Frankivsk, Volyn, and Lviv, are considered relatively safe and stable. The report also highlights that freedom of movement is largely unrestricted within government-controlled areas, meaning displaced Ukrainians could feasibly relocate internally to avoid conflict.

Despite this policy rationale, critics argue there is a glaring contradiction. The UK Foreign Office still advises against all non-essential travel to these very same areas, including the capital, Kyiv. Lawyers and human rights advocates say this discrepancy raises doubts over whether the Home Office's reasoning is consistent and reliable.

Since early 2025, growing numbers of Ukrainians have had their asylum applications rejected. While temporary visa extensions of up to 18 months remain available, many affected individuals now face an uncertain future. Some families, having fled active war zones, feel increasingly insecure about their ability to remain in the UK long term.

A particularly contentious case involved a Ukrainian applicant from Odessa whose asylum claim was rejected partly due to his family's dual Hungarian citizenship. The Home Office suggested he could safely relocate to Hungary, a country viewed as maintaining neutral or cordial ties with Russia. Legal experts have criticised this reasoning, arguing that it effectively undermines the sovereignty of Ukraine and disregards the applicant's circumstances and loss.

One applicant, Oleksandr, who fled Odessa after losing family members in a missile strike, shared his experience of having his asylum application refused. "I have nothing left to return to," he said. "But now I have no certainty here either."

Human rights advocates say such cases highlight the broader issue of policy interpretation and fairness in application. They warn that reducing permanent protection options may lead to further distress for those already suffering the trauma of displacement.

While the UK has offered generous temporary visa schemes since the outbreak of the conflict, including the Ukraine Family Scheme and Homes for Ukraine, the current shift indicates a change in long-term strategy. Authorities appear to be drawing a clearer line between short-term humanitarian relief and permanent resettlement.

Across Europe, the number of Ukrainians under temporary protection remains high. According to the European Commission, around 4.3 million Ukrainian nationals held protection status in EU countries as of January 2025. This figure is expected to fall slightly to 4.1 million by the end of the year and drop further to 3.8 million in 2026 as some refugees return home or move to new countries.

However, the National Bank of Ukraine projects continued outward migration, estimating around 200,000 people will leave the country annually through to 2027. Officials expect a gradual return of migrants only from 2027 onwards, assuming the conflict de-escalates and economic stability improves.

For those currently in the UK, the policy shift means many will now need to reassess their legal options and plans. Legal experts suggest some may consider applying for other forms of leave to remain, though these routes often involve complex criteria and are not guaranteed to succeed.

The Home Office has said it will continue to review conditions in Ukraine regularly, but for now, the updated guidance remains in effect. As legal challenges to the new approach begin to emerge, the matter is likely to attract further scrutiny over the coming months.